



Dear Reader:

Natural Areas, and Wilderness-type Recreation Policy
- A Discussion Paper

The attached discussion paper has been prepared by the Ministry of Forests to present its concept of Natural Areas and to solicit comments and recommendations to aid in development of the wilderness-type recreation policy.

This is an important issue with the Ministry since the areas included in the discussion represent almost half the Provincial Forest land under its resource jurisdiction. Work on this paper was in progress prior to the formation of the Wilderness Advisory Committee and it is now timely, in light of that Committee's work and recommendations, that this paper be released so that the Ministry of Forests' concepts are made widely known to interested parties.

You are encouraged to make its content widely known amongst your affiliates, clubs, and/or members. If more copies are needed than have been supplied, and if you have copying capability I would ask that you make duplicates to assist us in keeping printing volume to a reasonable level.

I trust that you will take this opportunity to make your views known so that they may be considered in the course of policy development. Written statements are requested and will be received until 30 September 1986 by the Director, Recreation Management Branch, Ministry of Forests, 1450 Government Street, Victoria, B.C., V8W 3E7.

Yours truly,

A.C. MacPherson
Deputy Minister

**A DISCUSSION PAPER
ON
NATURAL AREAS
AND
WILDERNESS-TYPE RECREATION POLICY**



Province of British Columbia

Ministry of Forests

July 1986

SYNOPSIS

More than half of the lands in 'provincial forests' are not forested or do not have commercially productive timber stands. Yet these lands are part of the management units' ecological and biological balance and are essential to the productive areas' health.

And, about half of all lands in 'provincial forests' (productive and non-productive) are at present undeveloped and in a 'natural' state.

This discussion paper, developed by the Recreation Management Branch, introduces the 'natural area' concept, defines it, and recommends it as a land management unit. As such, it can be identified and recorded, thus focussing attention on its values and the needs and demands it can meet.

It confirms that the Ministry of Forests administers 'provincial forests' and discharges its mandate for timber, range and recreation resource management on all lands under its resource jurisdiction.

It notes that steps are now being taken to correct the inadequate attention given by the ministry, due to other priorities, to resource planning and management of 'natural areas'.

And while the paper does not suggest that the timber and range components of the ministry's mandate are absent in 'natural areas', it does state that the recreation component may often be of a higher relative importance and needs an increased emphasis on planning and management.

It states that 'natural areas' provide an environment for wilderness-type recreation and the ministry is developing policy and procedures to manage this.

It also outlines the basic components of a wilderness-type recreation policy and invites suggestions for more details.

This paper has been distributed to ministry staff, other resource agencies, interested public recreation organizations and resource industry groups.

The reader is asked to consider the 'natural area' concept's rationale and validity, and the policy and procedures necessary to develop a wilderness-type recreation policy.

Please send your comments, before September 30, 1986, to:

The Director
Recreation Management Branch
Ministry of Forests
1450 Government Street
Victoria V8W 3E7

INTRODUCTION

This paper has three parts:

1. "Background": presents definitions, identifies the approximate area at present in a natural state, and outlines the system used for area assessment;
2. "Discussion of Natural Areas": further explores the concept and its management implications;
3. "Policy Requirements": outlines what should be addressed in the policy statement and presents some suggested wording to generate thought and input.

BACKGROUND

British Columbia has a land area totalling 94 million hectares of which 87 million hectares, or 92.5 per cent, are Crown lands.

About 81.5 million hectares, or 93.7 per cent, of Crown lands are within 'provincial forests' -- including Tree Farm Licenses (TFLs) and pending 'provincial forests' -- and are under the Ministry of Forests' jurisdiction. Thus, Crown lands within 'provincial forests' (including TFLs) account for 86.6 per cent of B.C.'s total land area.

About 40 million hectares (or 49.1 per cent) of all lands in productive and non-productive 'provincial forests' are undeveloped and in a 'natural' state.

The 'natural area' concept defines these lands.

Definition:

A 'natural area' is land under the ministry's jurisdiction where there has been no resource development and where natural processes have not been disrupted, except for compatible levels of range or recreational use.

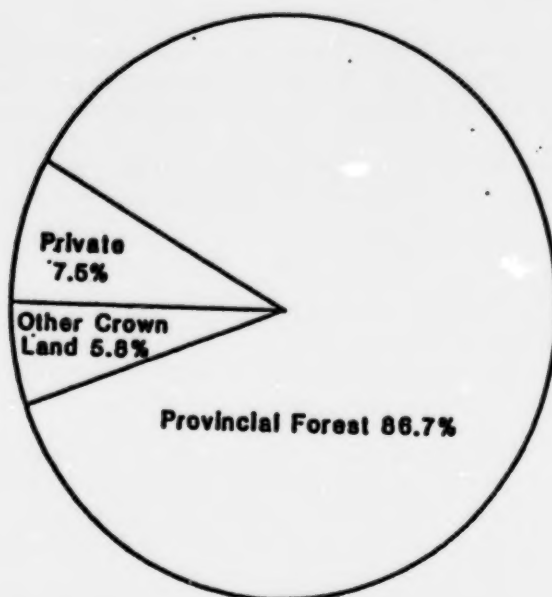
Preliminary Assessment of Area:

A preliminary estimate of the approximate size of 'natural areas' was made by extracting data from the Forest and Range Resource Analysis (1984) -- table B13, page B45.

This data was assembled under a severe time constraint and two arbitrary definition qualifiers were applied, which allowed broad banding into major areas.

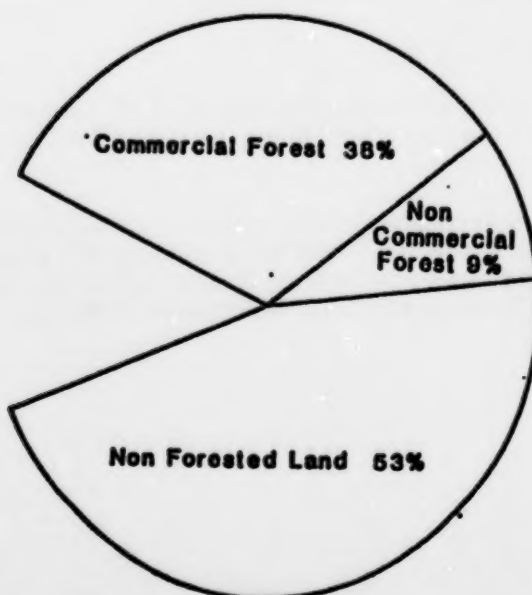
1. a 'natural area' is located at least 8 km (5 miles) from a roadhead;
2. an individual 'natural area' is a minimum of 5 000 ha.

**1. TOTAL LAND AREA OF THE PROVINCE (100%)
MAJOR ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS**

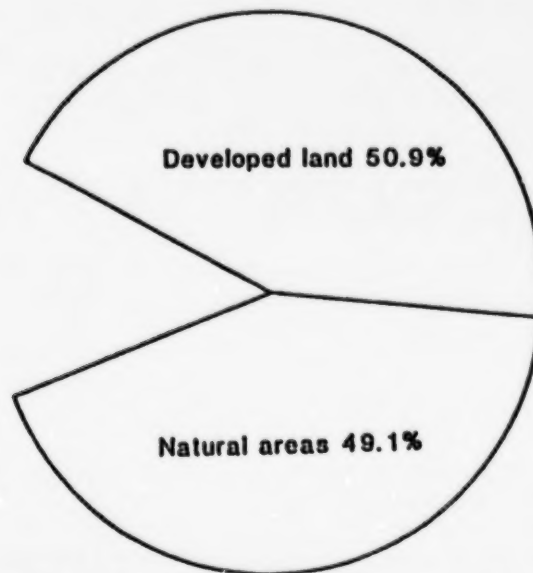


See charts 2, 3 & 4 for further breakdown

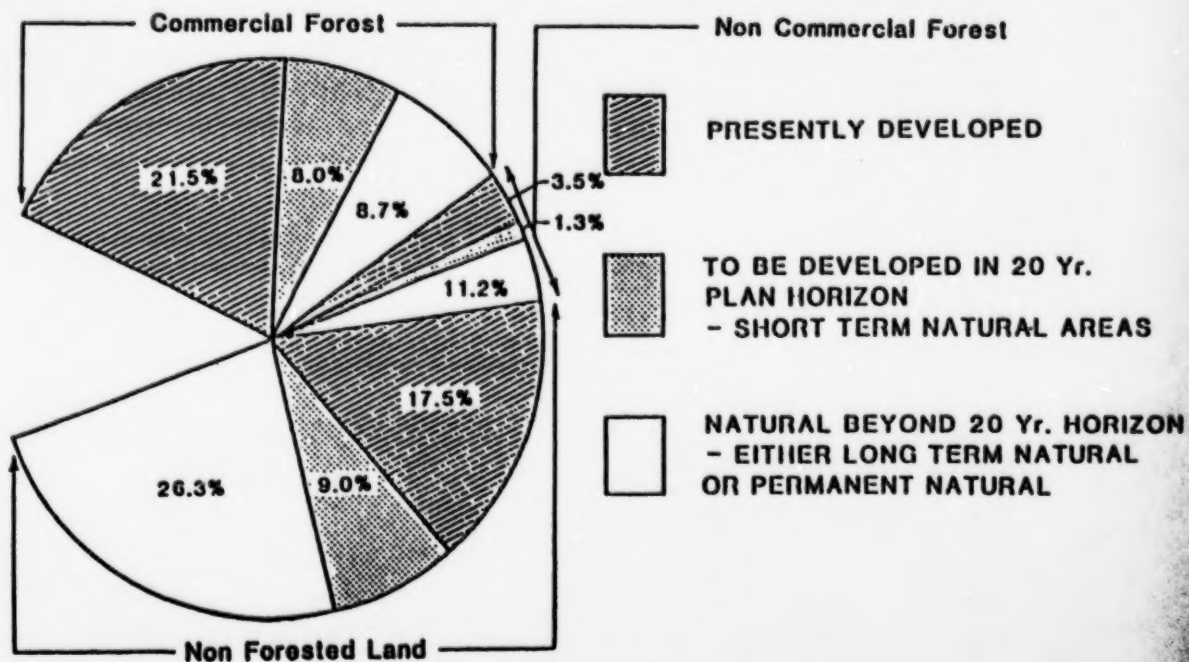
**2. PROVINCIAL FOREST LAND AREA (100%)
(FOREST COVER)**



**3. PROVINCIAL FOREST LAND AREA (100%)
(NATURAL AREA / DEVELOPED*AREA RELATIONSHIP)**



**4. PROVINCIAL FOREST LAND AREA (100%)
(NATURAL AREA / FOREST COVER RELATIONSHIP)**



•DEVELOPED AREA MEANS AREA ACCESSIBLE BY SEASONAL
4 WHEEL DRIVE OR HIGHER STANDARD ROADS

Future Assessment of Area:

For recreation management purposes, the ministry plans to implement the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) concept.

Current Definition Qualifiers:

Within this concept, for inventory purposes, a 'natural area' is defined as at least 1 000 hectares and located at least 1 kilometer from roads accessible to highway vehicles. (See Appendix 3-13, Chapter 3, Inventory Manual).

Note: Each 'natural area' has natural attributes and is big enough to create the environment and provide the opportunity for wilderness-type recreation experiences.

The ROS system identifies possible combinations of potential recreation activities and experiences relative to environmental settings. It then arranges them along a spectrum.

This spectrum is subdivided into classes, which can be related to management applications: from 'urban' in one extreme, to 'rural', to 'roaded resource', to 'semiprimitive', to 'primitive' in the other extreme.

Within this range, all possible recreation experiences can be identified and their compatibility with each environment examined.

The ministry's recreation management focuses mainly on 'roaded resource' and 'semiprimitive' areas. It does not include 'urban' areas and is limited in 'rural' areas.

The paper proposes that the recreation potential in 'semiprimitive' and 'primitive' areas be emphasized more than has been done previously, while the current emphasis on 'roaded resource' areas be maintained.

The ROS concept provides a more detailed interpretation of recreation inventory, and is an added tool to aid the resource manager in making decisions when recreation values are involved.

DISCUSSION ON NATURAL AREAS:

The 'natural area' concept is used as medium to address recreation in undeveloped areas within provincial forests.

This concept recognizes that:

- a. within the ministry's resource jurisdiction there are extensive 'natural areas'; and,
- b. a documented demand for wilderness-type recreation opportunities will be largely met through the values found in these 'natural areas'.

The 'natural area' term is preferred to 'wilderness area', or others incorporating 'wilderness' because:

- the latter has a history of polarized debate and statutory solutions, largely based on the U.S. experience;
- individual perceptions of 'wilderness', based on personal and emotional attitudes, vary widely;
- valid philosophical differences often lead to subjective assessments, obscuring constructive debate on management issues;
- while a 'natural area' incorporates the qualities and values claimed for 'wilderness', the term allows an objective definition in physical terms;
- 'natural area' better enables all interested parties to focus on substantive issues to determine what is possible and realistically achievable.

Jurisdiction and Mandate:

The ministry has the authority for timber, range and recreation management of Crown lands, which are not assigned by statute to another ministry of the provincial or federal governments, under the Ministry of Forests Act, the Forest Act and the Range Act.

The ministry's mandate is to manage the forest resource (not just the timber resource) by integrated resource use principles.

This implies that the forest resource is an interdependent, interactive complex of all the resource values within a geographic management unit.

There is, within a 'provincial forest', a complex mixture of timber stands, scrub, grassland, swamp, alpine and rock. (Water bodies are not considered here because they are not under the ministry's jurisdiction.)

Mobile elements -- water, fire, pests, diseases, cattle, game, fish and people (resource users) -- move through and between these different land types. Immobile elements -- principally soil, timber and forage -- affect and are affected, in turn, by the mobile ones.

Managing And Using The Forest Resource:

There are many demands made on the forest resource. The resource manager,

in consultation and co-operation with other resource managers and users, must balance and integrate these demands. This must be done in proportion to the ability of the forest resource to sustain the sum of all the demands. Attention cannot be isolated to a specific resource or set of demands.

Resource users/consumers tend to have specific demands and have the greatest direct interest in lands having values that optimize their particular interest. Correspondingly, they have less interest in lands where values are limited or absent. This holds good for all three principal user groups: the forest industry, the ranching industry and recreationists.

The ministry's current management response is highest in accessible areas of good forest lands. Here timber considerations generally receive greater emphasis than range or recreation considerations.

As distance from population centres increase and elevation rises management emphasis tapers off and the relative proportions of resource values change.

Timber values, for example, have a typical trend: from good (accessible, economic), to medium, to poor (inaccessible, uneconomic), to non-existent.

Range and recreation values also change, but not in the same pattern. Their quality and/or quantity may, in some cases, increase with distance and/or altitude.

It must be stressed that the term 'natural area' only confirms that an area was natural when it was classified. The term does not represent a judgement or commitment on how the 'natural area' will be used.

Decisions on the planned use of the resources in 'natural areas' -- including whether merchantable timber will be harvested or left uncut to retain the natural environment -- will be made on the specific situation's merits and as part of the TSA/TFL plan, which governs the whole management unit within which the 'natural area' occurs.

When an approved Allowable Annual Cut for a management unit is set, allowances will be made for any necessary constraints resulting from a perceived or potential need to withhold merchantable timber from cutting.

Regardless of the forest cover presence/absence when an area is in the 'natural area' category, this paper suggests that the strongest need for direct management involvement will be in the recreation aspect of the ministry's mandate.

Due to other priorities the ministry gave less emphasis in the past to resource planning and management of 'natural areas'.

While the paper does not suggest that the timber and range components of the ministry's mandate are absent in 'natural areas', it does state that the

recreation component may often be of a higher relative importance and needs an increased emphasis on planning and management of provincial forests.

There will be less need for immediate management attention from the timber and range components, except for some operational concerns for grazing use, or for protection emergencies.

There may be some long-term timber concerns dealing with inventory and planning in some 'natural areas'.

The management interests of other resources and responsible agencies -- lands and parks: Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing; fish, wildlife and water: Ministry of Environment; non-renewable natural resources: Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources -- though not specifically addressed here, are significant. They will influence decisions on the duration of a 'natural area' and its acceptable uses, as will the users' interests -- the forest industry, the ranching sector and recreation public.

Note: The potential impacts on the environment from exploration, access, and/or extraction of mineral and petroleum resource -- authorized by the Mineral Act, the Placer Mining Act, the Coal Act, and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Act -- will require particular attention.

Recreation Demands Related to Management Response:

The wilderness-type recreation experiences which comprise the recreation user demands within the 'natural areas' are identified as twofold:

- 1) Preservation-oriented experiences
 - 2) Activity-oriented experiences
1. Preservation-oriented Experiences: These imply a philosophical and environmental concern for preserving natural values and situations, untouched and as they are, with only the essential, minimum developments to aid recreation enjoyment and, no industrial extractive uses.

Preservation may be attained by:

- a. Statutory designation;
- b. De facto status with management designation.

a. Statutory Preservation:

While many 'natural areas' may be recommended for statutory preservation, rigid screening will be necessary to ensure that only areas having the highest quality get detailed consideration.

If an area is thus approved -- by interagency determination and Cabinet direction -- for statutory preservation, the Ministry of Forests takes the position that the area warrants class "A" provincial park status.

The area should, accordingly, be removed from the Provincial Forest and placed under the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing's jurisdiction under the Park Act.

b. De Facto Preservation:

Most of the 'preservation' areas will fall under this category. Many will be of high quality but excessive to a balanced park system's needs.

Retaining their environment is assured for the foreseeable future by remoteness, or inaccessibility, or absence of other demands.

These areas should remain under the ministry's management of primitive areas within the recreation program and as an ecological/biological part of the Provincial Forest unit.

Amendments to statutes will be required to confirm and strengthen the Ministry of Forests' mandate and to allow identification of the areas concerned.

2. Activity-oriented Experiences: These imply a range of recreation activities compatible with a wilderness-type environment. Typically these would involve mobile, physical activities through an area for scenic and environmental enjoyment, with unstructured, low density use focal points.

In many situations vehicular use (All Terrain Vehicles, or Off Road vehicles) would be adverse to the enjoyment of the majority of users and/or the management concept adopted. In others, some types of vehicular use could be compatible with the potential wilderness-type experiences.

'Natural areas' which facilitate wilderness activities should be kept under the Provincial Forest status under the ministry's jurisdiction. They will be managed as primitive and semi-primitive areas within the recreation program and as an ecological/biological part of the Provincial Forest unit.

Amendments to ministry statutes will be required.

Statutory recommendation:

Where a statutory link is required for a 'preservation-' or 'activity-' oriented 'natural area', the ministry's position is that it is better to amend existing statutes than have a specific wilderness statute.

Duration of a Natural Area:

Depending on the specifics of each case, on management area plans, and on resource decisions, a 'natural area' may be identified as 'permanent', 'long-term' or 'short-term'.

The assumptions made in these terms are:

- Permanent: a. statutory preservation: where 'natural areas' are assigned to the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing's jurisdiction and are removed from the Provincial Forest.
- b. de facto preservation: where 'natural areas' remain under the ministry's jurisdiction with Provincial Forest status.
- Long-term: natural areas within 'provincial forests' which may or may not carry commercial forest cover but in which no resource or road development is planned by the ministry during the 20-year planning horizon.
- Short-term: 'natural areas' within 'provincial forests' which carry commercial forest cover, and/or 'natural areas' in which resource development or road development is proposed by the ministry within the 20-year planning horizon.

These assumptions are valid in the context of the ministry's mandate.

The time frames may be modified by plans of other ministries, which have legitimate demands under other statutes on 'non-forest' resources in a 'natural area'.

While all 'natural areas' can supply wilderness-type recreation experiences, some will do so much longer than others.

Identification and Incorporation of a Natural Area into the Ministry's Planning Systems:

The record of 'natural areas' and hectares should be included in tabular appendices to each TSA/TFL management plan.

Considerable data is on hand, either from TSA data on 20 years planning objectives or from recreation inventory data. This will illustrate the substantial component of almost all TSA's/TFL's in the Natural category.

The TSA and TFL plan should identify those 'natural areas' for which specific recreation plans and prescriptions will be made, and the recreation commitments applicable to all 'natural areas'.

The planning linkages between 'natural areas' and adjacent developed forest land (i.e. with access and under harvesting plan) should be identified.

The timber and recreation sectors should carefully consider the plan prescriptions on access management and harvesting proposals in the short-term natural category (the 'frontier' zone).

The rationale applied in this paper is that 'natural areas' are an identifiable component land type within the larger management unit (TSA/TFL);

during the unit's integrated resource use management, specific policy and management prescriptions, reflecting their particular contribution to the socio-economic values of the whole, are needed.

The wilderness-type recreation policy, addressed in the next section, is intended to apply to primitive and semi-primitive situations.

Over time, some 'natural areas' -- e.g. the short-term category -- will be developed. At that time the area, or portions of it, will move from 'natural area' category to 'roaded-resource' land and be subject to the forest recreation management traditionally associated with such land.

WILDERNESS-TYPE RECREATION POLICY

A) Suggested Policy:

The purpose of this policy is to recognize the importance of wilderness-type recreation, provide a framework for managing it within a 'natural area' concept, and develop area priorities for recreation management implementation.

It is the ministry's policy to manage wilderness-type recreation in 'natural areas', as a component of its overall recreation mandate on all Provincial Forest lands, and in accordance with integrated resource use principles by:

1. identifying, inventorying and classifying existing 'natural areas'.
2. consulting with user groups on wilderness-type needs, demands and priorities.
3. recognizing that 'natural areas' may occupy that category for varying lengths of time and that, depending on resource values present, resource use may occur to reflect "the immediate and long term economic and social values they may confer on the Province".
4. assigning a "priority for recreation management" ranking to each 'natural area'.
5. planning and managing selected, priority 'natural areas' for compatible recreation uses, of a type and at a user density consistent with retaining a wilderness-type experience and a pristine (primitive) or near-pristine (semi-primitive) environment.
6. creating a recreation-specific plan for each selected priority 'natural area', with integration into the larger management area plan (TSA/TFL) in which the 'natural area' is situated.
7. establishing a management notation as a Recreation Priority Area for each above noted selected priority 'natural area'.
8. providing only the essential minimum of recreation improvements needed to allow public access and wilderness-type use.
9. investigating opportunities for volunteer participation in recreation management.
10. endorsing and applying the basic principles of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, as adapted and modified to the Provincial situation from the R.O.S. system.
11. making the necessary amendments to Ministry statutes to achieve the stated purpose.

B) Suggested Procedures:

The following topic and subtopic headings are identified as those which will require more detailed statements in the final policy document. Readers may identify others.

1. Off-area approach access for road vehicles:
How close is close enough? What road-head parking provisions? What control measures?

2. Off-area trail linkage from road head to Natural Area:
Necessary or not? If yes, what quality, distance, and signing standards?
3. Off-area visual impacts for 'on area' recreationists:
What landscape management considerations? What type? To what degree?
4. General signing:
Type? Content? Frequency?
5. On-area vehicular (ATV/off-road) recreational-use activities:
Permissible or non-permissible? What rationale for each? If permissible - for which types of vehicle, which situations or areas?
- which time periods? what density?
If non-permissible - what control measures?
6. On-area physical recreational use (same questions for horseback activity):
What are compatible uses/activities?
What are compatible activity areas within 'natural areas'?
What are compatible activity periods (time of year/day)?
What are compatible user densities?
Where deemed non-compatible - what control measures?
7. On-area commercial recreation guiding:
Compatible or not? In which situations or areas?
8. On-area recreation facilities:
Trails. Needed? If yes, standards? signing?
Focal points (mini-sites) needed? Install structures or not? Sanitation?
Servicing? Horse corrals?
9. On-area other users or potential users:
What interaction with extractive users of resources?
 - timber industry
 - ranching industry
 - mining industry
 - trappers
 - sports hunters
 - sports fishermen
10. Public volunteer groups:
What degree of participation in management?
What type of co-operative linkages with the ministry?
11. Other:
?

Although the Recreation Management Branch has developed lines of thought on many of the above items, they are not included in this paper.

Rather, the approach taken is to pose the issues and items for your consideration.

You are encouraged to consider the implications and submit your views and suggestions to:

**The Director,
Recreation Management Branch,
Ministry of Forests,
1450 Government Street
Victoria V8W 3E7**